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SUBJECT: Niger: President Tandja's New Year Address of Dip Corps:
Rationalizing, Scolding, and Warning

Ref: a) 09 Niamey 0044, b) 09 Niamey 0899, c) 09 Niamey 1008

11. (SBU) Summary: On January 13, President Tandja accepted the greetings of the Dean of the diplomatic corps and addressed the assembled group in his customary manner. Although most of his remarks offered a lengthy defense for his anti-democratic political maneuverings of the past year, he argued that they had occurred at the behest of the people. President Tandja, somewhat surprisingly, scolded some for not observing protocol and warned in general against interference in the nation's internal affairs. He went on to temper this threat, urging the diplomatic community to continue its efforts to strengthen the friendship and partnership that Nigeriens have come to welcome and enjoy. President Tandja also recalled with pride success in ending the conflict with rebel groups in the north, noted the role of trafficking in drugs and arms in insecurity, and mentioned rising commodity prices due to climate change and poor weather conditions. End summary.

12. (U) After receiving the customary New Year's greetings from the Dean of the diplomatic corps, the Algerian ambassador, President Tandja presented his remarks to the diplomatic corps, other than the United States and Canada, which both elected not to participate, His remarks were as follows:

(Begin text)

Mr Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and gentlemen members of diplomatic and consular missions;
Ladies and gentlemen representatives of international and regional organizations;
We thank the All Mighty and the All Merciful, who once again has provided us with the opportunity to meet again, to share this solemn moment devoted to the ceremony to present New Year wishes. Having respected this tradition with the heads of the institutions of the Republic, the current ceremony with the diplomatic corps is of special significance to us. As a matter of fact, it enables us to express our constant friendship and renewed gratitude to you for the invaluable cooperation which Niger has always benefited from each one of the countries and institutions you represent, a friendship and gratitude for which we have always worked together in the context of solidarity and international cooperation, for the improvement of the livelihood of Niger's people. This meeting also provides the opportunity to evoke, in a sort of direct dialogue, the major events that characterized national life by paying particular attention to the observations, which you as privileged observers, have to make on the development of this country in terms of the achievements made, the perspectives for Niger and its people, and the challenges to meet.
First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr Dean, for the good wishes you expressed, on behalf of your colleagues, to Niger and its people, to the officials in charge of the Institutions of the Republic, and to myself for the new year. Please receive in return, my equally warm wishes to all of you, your respective families and

to the authorities of the countries and institutions you represent. May the year 2010 bring to all of us, good health and success in our endeavors, so that in peace and mutual comprehension, the noble ambitions you entertain for the progress of our people and the whole of mankind may be accomplished.

Mr Dean,

You noted, with good reason, that Niger experienced a particularly intense 2009, both politically and economically. In either instance, considering the highly significant actions the people of Niger made in a patriotic drive, it is with a renewed confidence in our capacity to meet the important challenges our Nation is facing that we are starting this year 2010. The major fact, in this firm resolve, remains that the people expressed themselves in the August 4 referendum in favor of the radical reform of the Republic. The choice results from a healthy analysis of democratic practice in Niger and is translated by the option to see the conduct of government affairs carried out in a new spirit which puts an end to the institutional mechanism relying on compromises and bargaining so cherished by certain political leaders but which does not serve the national interest. Therefore, on the occasion of this referendum, Niger's people expressed themselves in complete freedom in the exercise of their sovereignty, and thus gave new direction and vision to the future of the country. A certain political class, which failed to bring about its contradiction through the ballot, resorted to a campaign of disinformation and promised to put this country to fire and sword, on the grounds of a so-called fight for democracy, even though they failed to observe one of democracy's fundamental principles, which is the submission to the will of the people.

As far as we are concerned, our line of conduct is the one dictated by the people of Niger, and it is because we remained confident about it that, despite all the challenges, all the subversive

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speeches and slander conveyed by the national and international media, we satisfied this people's demand. The process of radical reform indeed took place both in accordance with legal provisions and in the acceptance of differences of opinions which each and everyone could nurture; and the final decision was dependent on the sole sovereign will of Niger's people.

This, Mr Dean, ladies and gentlemen members of the diplomatic corps, is the atmosphere which surrounded the process, conducted in a democratic and republican context which, however, some people would like to deny the entire nation. But we have faith that this internal debate, transformed into a profound crisis for unavowed motives, will end with the ongoing inter Nigerien dialogue, facilitated by the ECOWAS mediator Abdul Salami Abubakar.

I remain convinced that those whose only strategy was to discredit this country, which is equally theirs, in the campaign against this radical reform process, will have a change of heart for the preservation of the national interest, because it is first and foremost the duty of Niger's people to build their country and make it an active and respected member on the international scene.

Mr Dean,

Diplomatic practice the world over is conducted in such a way that the diplomatic community takes part in the activities of the host country and supports the people both in times of happiness and sorrow. You underscored very opportunely, the need for this community to fully take part in the life of the country, in the framework of the duty of its representation and in respect of the obligation of reserve to which the members are also bound. As far as we are concerned, no ambiguity should continue to surround the issue. That is why those who believe they are entitled to depart from these principles and continue to flout the rules of protocol relating to the institutions which the people freely acquired, will soon pay the consequences. Niger is ready to work, as usual, in the context of the friendship between peoples, with all the peace and justice loving countries; however, outside of any interference in its internal affairs, and in the respect of the sovereignty and dignity of its people.

You also said it, Mr Dean, the diplomatic community has a role to play in the process of this country's development, for the improvement of the livelihood of Niger people. The very essence of this brotherly presence is to strengthen friendship ties and establish fruitful partnerships that will lead to the deployment, in the best conditions, of assistance which the countries and

institutions you represent, have provided to Niger, in all the areas of common interest. Niger and its people will always be grateful to you and I know with all of you, we still have a lot of initiatives to materialize together, in this permanent quest for the well-being of our people, and in order to ensure peace and tranquility everywhere in our respective countries.

Mr Dean,

Ladies and gentlemen heads of diplomatic and consular services, If there is another event during the last year which Niger can recall with pride, it is definitely the return of peace to the northern part of the country, which was as you know it, subjected to insecurity for a few years, caused so many rifts, and slowed down economic activity in the region of Agadez. Today, thanks to the assistance of our brother, the Guide of the Libyan Revolution, and with the perfect understanding of the real stakes for Niger at this moment by the soldiers of the armed forces, all the armed rebellions have pledged, in conjunction with the Government, to accept the dynamics of peace, by agreeing to lay down their weapons.

I congratulate them, and I also congratulate all the people of Niger at the same time, because the return of the members of the rebellion to their respective families has demonstrated how our countrymen are able to challenge themselves in order to put their country above any other ambition. From now on, the region of Agadez, which is already experiencing strong mining activity with a real impact on the livelihood of the people, is gaining renewed impetus with the upturn of tourist activities, because of this newly found peace. All the necessary measures have been taken to strengthen this process, so that the children of Niger can look in the same direction and work resolutely toward nation building.

However, we know the challenge is great. Lasting peace in the Sahel and Sahara region requires collective efforts, sustained cooperation in a regional context, and the coordinated and efficient fight against all sorts of trafficking which we have been insistently drawing attention to for some years now. We have always said that drugs and arms trafficking is at the very heart of the insecurity, which kept growing in various forms, in the sub-region. The recent unfortunate events in the north of Tillaberi, those of Telemes a few days later and the kidnapping of other foreigners carried out again some months ago, ended up showing the transnational nature of this phenomenon.

That is why the fight for the security and stability of this sub-region warrants constant vigilance and combined efforts. This

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challenge, Mr Dean, is facing us, concomitantly with other concerns such as the ones related to the consequences of climate change, namely bad weather which our people are subjected to, the issue of food security, which is thwarted by soil erosion and erratic the seasons, all of which are happening in a context of rising prices of basic commodities.

All these questions and the global answers they need, give their true meaning to international solidarity and cooperation but also to the willingness to live together, in a world of peace and shared prosperity.

Niger's 6th Republic is ready to commit itself to meeting these common challenges, in the framework of sustained cooperation with all its partners, by making its contribution to the building of peace and progress for all.

Thank you for your kind attention.

(End text)

Comment

13. (SBU) More than half of President Tandja's remarks involved a well-worn rationale behind his political maneuverings of the past year, repeating the oft-told explanation that the circumstances were due to the "peoples' will." His scolding those who were absent for not observing protocol and warning against interference in Niger's internal affairs came as a surprise, and quite a contrast to his remarks of the year before, which the U.S. Charge attended, and at which President Tandja mentioned political change in the United States favorably (ref A). His frustration likely reflected his dismay that that several ambassadors declined a GON invitation to attend the installation of the newly-elected National Assembly on November 14, including the United States, France, Nigeria, Germany, and the European Commission (ref B). The notable absence of the

U.S. Ambassador and Canadian Head of Aid Mission at the New Year's address no doubt caught his attention.

14. (SBU) President Tandja's reaction, along with his criticism of ECOWAS on December 20 (ref C), attests to his growing irritation with outsiders who refuse to accept as legitimate his political machinations and dare to levy sanction against his Tazartche state. It is entirely possible that the near future will see a diplomat or NGO being expelled from Niger. On January 11, responding to New Year's wishes from the heads of government agencies, President Tandja asked Nigeriens to brace for "sacrifices" that might result from international sanctions. He said, "The fight has just begun, and imposes upon us more sacrifice, courage, and determination to face the numerous challenges before us."

15. (SBU) Although President Tandja referred to trafficking in arms and drugs, he did not mention international terrorists specifically, as he did last year (ref A). Also, he noted with pride Niger's success in bringing to an end nearly three years of conflict with rebel Tuareg groups in the nation's north, going to the point of thanking the "Guide of the Libyan Revolution" for assisting in this process. Finally, he mentioned in passing, only at the end of his remarks, climate change and other conditions that had led to rising commodity prices and the issue of food security. End comment.

WHITAKER